

# BASIC QUESTIONS ON HIV / AIDS

## What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, and is the virus that can lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS. HIV damages a person's body by destroying specific blood cells, called CD4+ T cells, which are help the body fight diseases, Without these cells, it is difficult for the body to protect itself from diseases.

## What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, a condition that occurs in some people after many years of living with HIV (usually from 7 to 10 years). "Acquired" means that the disease is not hereditary but develops after birth from contact with a disease-causing virus (in this case, HIV); "immunodeficiency" means that the disease is characterized by a weakening of the immune system; and "syndrome" refers to a group of symptoms that indicate a disease.

## How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is found in the blood, sperm, vaginal fluid, breast milk, saliva and other fluids of a person infected with HIV. An infected person can transmit the virus to others through sexual intercourse or sharing razors or needles, and an infected mother can transmit the virus to her child during pregnancy, delivery, or breast-feeding.

HIV cannot be transmitted by touching, shaking hands, hugging, coughing, sneezing, saliva, tears, kissing on cheeks, swimming together or sharing swimming equipment, insects, sharing dishes or utensils, through the air, sleeping in the same bed, fellowship in the church/ mosque, or working together.

## How do you know if you are infected with HIV?

The only way to know your status is to get tested for HIV. You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether or not you are infected. Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms at all for 10 years or more. Therefore, it is important to know your status so you can make informed decisions that can prolong your life and protect the health of your partner.



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## Why are women more vulnerable to getting HIV/AIDS?

Women greatly surpass men in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS, and in many areas women double the number of men with the virus. In Tanzania, HIV prevalence is higher among women than men (7 percent versus 5 percent, respectively).

The reasons why HIV and AIDS have been particularly devastating to women are due to 3 sets of factors: social and economical reasons, cultural and religious reasons, and physiological reasons. Most of these reasons are associated with gender and power in relationship.

Women suffer from lower status, which makes them vulnerable because:

- Lower education levels make them less likely to understand prevention information
  - Lower income makes them more likely to exchange sex for money and other things
  - Abuse of power from men and sexual violence make women more likely to be raped or be in other situations where
- Physiological reasons women are more at risk include that:
- The vagina provides a bigger entryway for HIV than the penis
  - The semen stays inside a woman for quite a while
  - The moist environment of the vagina.

## How can you protect yourself from HIV?

We can protect ourselves from HIV in the following ways:

- Not having sex when we are not married.
- Reducing the number of sexual partners we have
- Using condoms whenever we have sexual relations
- Remaining faithful to our partners

